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Dissertation by

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Theo.^{k} Sedgw.^{k}

the practicability of introducing the gospel

A Dissertation on Persia

In this dissertation I propose

I To give a very big history of Persia

II To give a view of its present state.

III To enquire into some of the best probable means of extending the gospel in that country.

This country, which is both ancient and interesting, was settled early after the flood. It is pretty evident the first inhabitants of it were the immediate descendants of Elam the son of Shem, from whom in the scriptures, it is called Elam.

In consequence of the very superficial knowledge which the Greeks and Jews

had of this country and the loss of the Persian
Archives, little is known of the Persians
until the time Cyrus. It is however believ-
-ed that Persia was a separate kingdom
long before his time, as there is found a
history compiled by a Mahometan from
the writings of certain Persians who fled
out of their country when ~~it was~~ their
religion was invaded by Zoroaster. This
history gives an account of their race of kings
from the earliest times after the flood.
These kings are spoken of as remarkable for
their virtue, their piety, and the mildness
and happiness of their administrations.
Among these ancient kings was Chedor-
laomer, mentioned ~~by~~ in Genesis, who with
some tributary kings made war upon
the five Cities of the plain.

The first Persian king we have mention

=ed in Grecian history is Astiages, who was grandfather to Cyrus the Great. This later Prince united the kingdoms of Media and Persia into one. And after conquering Babylon, Sardis and other countries was quietly settled on the throne of Persia, which was then made to extend from the River Araxes to the Indus 1840 miles and in breadth from the River Oxus to the Persian Gulph 1080 miles. Cyrus died about the year 529 before Christ, leaving his son Cambyses heir to his kingdom. The kingdom continues and flourished in the hands of Cyrus' descendants (with only one exception (Smerdis an imposter) for two hundred years untill the time of Darius Codomanus who was conquered by Alexander the Great and his kingdom destroyed.

After the death of Alexander it fell into the possession of Seleucus Nicator one of the four generals who shared the Macedonian kingdom. The Persians continued subject to this prince for 62 years, untill the Parthians revolting overcame the greater part of them and brought them within their own jurisdiction. They remained subject to the Parthians for 475 years, when the Sovereignty of the Persians were again restored. This was done by one Artaxerxes a private person and of spurious birth, but of uncommon abilities and great ambition. He was no sooner seated on the throne than he conceived designs of Restoring the kingdom to its former glory. He therefore gave out to the Romans, that as the successor of Cyrus he had a right to Reign Asia, and should therefore lay claim to it, which brought him into a war with the Romans. In this war he

appear neither to have gained nor lost much as to territory.

He ever succeeded by his son Sapor a prince of great abilities both of body and of mind, but haughty, fierce and cruel. He prosecuted a war against the emperor Valerian, whom he carried home prisoner and treated for a long time in the most ingnominious and inhumen manner; and at last flayed him alive. Sapor after this had an uninterrupted course of misfortunes. He died in the year after Christ 273, after reigning 31 years. He ever succeded by his son Hormisdas and he by Varanes II. After this we hear nothing of them very interesting untill the overthrow of the empire by the Saracenes. The last of the Persians monarchs of the line of Artax

~~Persia~~ was Jezdegerd, who was
cotemporary with Omar, second Calif
after Mahomed. He was scarcely sea
=ed on his throne when he found himself
attacked by a powerful army of the
Saracens, under the command of one Saad.
Every effort was used on the part of the
Persians to oppose the progress of this
army by skirmishes and other means, but
to no purpose, untill at length they
came to a decisive battle, which last
=ed three days and three nights, in which
battle the Saracens were victorious.

Persia continued subject to the
Saracens untill the decline of their
empire, when it was Sacked by ver
=mous insurgents untill Jenghiz Khan, who
conquered it as well as almost all Asia.
After his death which happened in the year
1227, Persia was governed by officers

appointed by his successors till the year 1253 when it became once more a mighty empire under Houlaku the Mogul. After his death his son Abaka succeeded to his extensive dominions: and his first care was to shut up all the avenues of his kingdom against the other princes of the race of Jenghez Khan who then reigned in different parts of Tartary. Abaka died in the year 1282 after a reign of 17 years. Both he and his successors seem to have been unhappy in their reigns, for this history affords little else from this period, but insurrections murders and rebellions among their subjects till 1335 when it split to pieces and was usurped by a great number of petty princes: all of whom were at perpetual war with each other till the time of Tamerlane who once more reduced them all under one jurisdiction.

After the death of Tamerlane, Persia continued to be governed by his son Shah-Rukh in wise and valiant piece; but immediately after his death, fell into the same confusion as before, being ruled by a great number of petty tyrants, till the beginning of 16th Cy. when it was conquered by Shah Ismael Safi.

The reigns of the succeeding princes afford nothing remarkable until the time of Shah Abbas I. surnamed the great. He ascended the throne in 1584; and his first care was to recover back from the Turks and Tartars those large provinces they had seized upon, and which had formerly belonged to the Persian empire. Shah Abbas considerably enlarged his dominions and repelled two formidable invasions of the Turks. He attempted also to promote commerce and to civilize his subjects. The princes who

successors Shah Abbas were remarkable only for their cruelties and debaucheries which occasioned a revolution in 1716 when the Shah Hussein was dethroned by the Affghans a people inhabiting the country between Persia and India. The throne was however soon recovered by prince Thamas the only survivor of the family of Abbas. Thamas in recovering the throne, invited to his assistance one Nadir Khan an enterprising nobleman to be his general. This Nadir Khan being a man of great and daring ambition and taking the advantage of the confidence the king placed in him and other favourable circumstances, at length made his way to the throne by procuring the death of his sovereign. When he ascended the throne he proceeded to change the religion of Persia to that of Omar. He banished the Shiy priests

i put to death his own son, and even guilty of such cruelties, that he was at length assassinated by his own relations 1747.
A contest upon this ensued between the relations for the crown, which has rendered Persia a scene of the most horrible confusion for more than 40 years.

The present reigning monarch is Futteh Ali Shah who ascended the throne in 1795. He is a prince little inclined to war. In his character there is nothing amiable and much that is odious. There have been remarkable instances of his cruelty and avarice. Nothing can exceed, says Mr. Kinnier, the profusion of ornamental finery with which his palace and person are surrounded. His throne, his clothing, his arms and all his royal insignia, exhibit one blaze of pearls and diamonds, rubies and emeralds

His face is obscured by an immense beard and whiskers which are kept very black and it is only when he talks and smiles that his mouth is discovered. He is said to have a taste for libations.

Abbas Mirza, the prince of one of the northern provinces, is heir apparent to the crown, and will undoubtedly succeed his father; as the Emperor of Russia is engaged by treaty to support his title. His character is very much unlike his father's: plain and simple in his manners, his whole attention is turned to the improvement of his troops in discipline and tactics. He possesses the rare virtue in a modern Persian of telling the truth when he speaks.

II It was proposed in the second place to give a view of the present state of Persia

What is called Modern Persia is about 1300 miles long and 1100 broad; lying between 25° and 44° north latitude and 44 & 70 deg. east longitude from London. Bounded by mountains from Circassian Tartary on the northwest by the Caspian sea which divides it from Russia on the north; by the river Oxus which divides it from Usbec Tartary on the northeast, by India on the east; by the Indian ocean and the gulphs of Persia and Oman on the south; and by Arabia and Turkey on the west.

Their government is an absolute monarchy of the most despotic kind; the prince having the disposal of the lives and property of all his subjects in his own hand. The Persians have no laws to depen-

-dent of the will [illegible] the sovereign; except that females and those males who are blind cannot hold the throne. On account of the latter part of this law, the reigning prince generally puts out the eyes of those of his family of whom he has a jealousy. The Persian kings generally have a great many women belonging to their harem; and it is death for any man, except the eunuchs who have the care of them, to look upon them, even tho it be accidently. Justice is carried on in Persia in a very summary manner; the sentence, whatever it may be, is generally put into execution on the spot. They have no nobility, nor is there any respect shown to any man on account of his family, except to those who are of the blood of their great prophet & patriarchs. But every man is esteemed according to his post

of office and when he is dismissed he loses
his turban, and is no longer distinguished
from the vulgar.

The number of inhabitants in all Persia
though very imperfectly known is sup
=posed to be, by some, about 20,000,000
The Persians are generally men of handsom
stature, shape and complexion, of ver
y fair - the Jews who are ill shaped
clumsy and of an olive complexion -
Their women also are well proportioned
and handsome, tho. not equal in this respe=
=ct to the Georgian and Circassian ladies
The dress both of the men and women
where it can be afforded is generally
rich. The men wear a wide turban
on their heads; some of these interwoven
with gold or silver; a vest, girt
about with a sash over which they

wear a loose garment something short
-er: with slippers or sandals on their
feet. When they ride on horseback which
is almost every day, they wear instead
of slippers pliant boots made of yel
-low leather. The trappings upon
their horses are often gaudy and
very rich. Whether on horseback
or afoot they always wear a broad
sword and dagger in their sash. The
dress of the females differs little from
that of the males; they wear longer
vests, with stiffened caps on their
heads and their hair down.

The Persians accustom themselves
to frequent washings, which is the
more necessary as they seldom change
their linnen. They rise early and, tak
-take of their coffee: about eleven they
go to dine upon fruits, sweetmeats

and milk; but their chief meal is at night when they sup. They esteem it an abomination to cut either their bread or their meat after it is prepared on the table. They likewise have their loaves made into cakes which may be easily broken and their meat is prepared before it is brought upon the board that it may be easily divided with the fingers. They eat without knife or fork, as neither is known among them.

In politeness the Persians are said to be the Parisians of the east. Whilst a rude and insolent demeanour peculiarly characterizes the conduct of the Turks towards foreigners and Christians, the behaviour of the Polite Persians, on the contrary would do honour to the most civilized nations. They are civil

courteous and obliging to strangers, without being guided by those religious prejudices so very prevalent in every other Mahomedan nation. They are fond of enquiring after the manners and customs of the Europeans, and in their turn are very ready to return an answer to any enquiry which may be made respecting them. Hospitality is considered so high a point with them that a man considers himself much honoured if you will call into his dwelling and partake of what the family affords. When on the contrary if the guest goes out without smoking or taking some refreshment, it is deemed by the Persian a great affront. They are fond of conversing in large companies, in which they engage with

much sprightliness. After their last meals at night, in their own families, they sit down in a circle and amuse themselves by relating pleasant stories, of which they are exceedingly fond; also by repeating passages from the works of their most favourite poets, and in various sorts of games.

A man in Persia may marry either for life or a limited time. There are five different kinds of marriage among them. The first is marriages contracted for children by parents during the children's minority. The second is celebrated with ceremonies. The third, such persons as marry of their own accord. The fourth, marriages to the dead, which

is occasioned by the belief they en-
-tertain that married persons are
peculiarly happy in the other world,
and on this account they marry one
to him or her who may have died
in celibacy, and the ceremony is pro-
-nounced soon after the burial of the
deceased. The fifth is the disposal
of adopted children in marriage. The
Persians entertain the religious opin-
-ion that every one should leave chil-
-dren either natural or adopted.

The Persians in ancient times were famous
for learning and learned men; their poets were
famed throout the east. There is a manuscript
in Oxford of England containing the lives
of a hundred and thirty of the finest Persian
Poets. Ferdusi and Sadi were among the
most celebrated of them. The former composed
the history of Persia in a series of epic
poems, which employed him nearly thirty

years, and which are said by Sir W. Jones to be a glorious monument of eastern genius and learning. Sadi was a native of Shiraz and flourished in the thirteenth century. He wrote many fine pieces both in prose and verse. To these may be added the sweet Hafiz, as he called, who is stiled the Anacreon of the east. Such has been the veneration for this poet, that the Persians have erected a splendid monument to his memory at Shiraz where they assemble yearly to pour out their libations upon it. Persia may still be considered as a country in which learning exists in a pretty considerable degree. This appears from the fact that Henry Martin frequently met with learned men in Shiraz and in other places. Other recent travelers bear the same testimony. Mr. Kinneir says that all classes from the highest to the lowest are acquainted with their best

poets; and ~~but~~ it is not uncommon to hear the most menial servant repeat with correctness long passages from them. Schools are not wanting for children and a moderate share of education is within the reach of most of those who live in towns and villages. There are, it is said in most of the towns and cities, colleges in which youths are taught their own tongue, the Arabic, moral philosophy and the Mahomedan religion.

The Persian language says Dr. Buchannan in a missionary point of view is next in importance to the Arabic and Chinese, because it is generally spoken or understood from Damascus to Calcutta. It is spoken at all the Mussulman courts in all India, and is the language of judicial proceedings under the British government in Hindostan. With respect to its character it is considered the language

of poetry; excelling all the other languages of the east in its strength, beauty and melody. Like all other eastern languages of it is highly metaphorical.

In speaking of their religion I cannot help going back, for a moment, in their history and saying few words concerning the religion of the ancient Persians. As they were the immediate decendents of Eber the pious and obedient son of Shem, they of course received from him the knowledge of the true God. They held the unity of God and were averse to Idolatry. But in process of time they fell into the idolatrous religion of the Babains. This religion was of two kinds, one consisted in the worship of Idols, the other in that of the heavenly hosts. The Persians embraced the latter kind. They did not however so far fall as not to be reconciled

; for their Religion was reformed and restored to its original purity by Abraham, as they themselves declare. If they received their religious knowledge from Abraham as Dr. Hyde confidently says, he of course taught them concerning the creation of the world, the flood and other things which he had by tradition. It is certain they have always had some, though a vague, knowledge of the flood and of Abrahams offering up his son Isaac.

They were so opposed to Idolatry that they would not have so much as temples, and therefore performed their sacred rites under the open sky. The sacred fire which they used in their worship is supposed to have been taken from the example of the Jews' perpetual fire burning upon the altar. After a while they began to pay divine worship to the fire itself. Zoroaster reformed their religion which had in his day become corrupt, as Abraham had done

before him, in doing which he follow-
-ed his steps. His book of religion is cal-
-led codex Abrahami, because, as professor
Hyde says, he delivered to the Persians the
religion of Abraham. He also says that
Zoroaster was acquainted with the Jewish
scriptures and conversed with the Jews them-
-selves. The wise men (or Magi) who visited
our Saviour at his birth are said by Dr. Hyde
to have come from Parthia, a nation which
professed the same religion with the Persians
to whom also the Persians were at this
time tributary. The Persians
as well as the Jews looked for the Mes-
-siah. Dr. Hyde says Dr. Hyde let
it not be thought incredible that the Per-
-sians should have a knowledge of the
coming Messiah since the founder
of their religion was acquainted with
the Jewish scriptures. He, i.e. Zoroaster,
alludes how often to occultly to him more than once
in his writings. He has one remarkable

prophecy which I beg leave to translate from Dr. Hyde. He taught, says Abulpharagj a persian writer, the Persians concerning the manifestation (or coming) of the Lord Christ; commanding that at his coming they should bring their gifts to him. And he indicated, that it would come to pass in the last times, a virgine would conceive a child; and when he should be born there would a star appear which would shine for some time, and in the middle of which would be seen the figure of a virgine girl. And ye & my sons will perceive its rise before any of the other nations. When therefore ye shall see the star, departing go whithersoever that leads you. And when ye have found, adore the child itself, offering to him your gifts. Our author conjectures that the reason why God honored the Persians in this instance, more

than any other of the gentile nations was because they were the only people, except the Jews, who retained the knowledge of the true God.

After Christianity was dissiminated in the world by the Apostles it flourished in Persia untill their kingdom was overthrown by the Saracens. After this Mahomidanism was established among them, which has remained the principle religion untill this day. To this is to be attributed their present degredation, the despotic nature of their government and the consequent oppression of their subjects. The Mahomidans are divided into two great sects, the followers of Omar who besides the Koran, hold to certain traditions concerning their prophet which they consider as sacred; and the followers of Ali who hold only to the Koran. The Persians are of the latter class.

There are a few of the worshipers of fire still among them, who are called Genbers, but

they are annually decreasing in Persia. They are so insulted and distressed by government that either they become converts to Mahomedanism or they emigrate to their brethren in India. Sir Wm. Jones and others assert that they are most wrongfully accused of worshiping fire or the sun; that on the contrary they worship the believing and true God, of whom the everlasting fire and sun are emblems.

Within a few years there has risen up a sect of philosophers called Soofies who seem to threaten the downfall of Mahomedanism. There are, according to Mr Schmid Missionary at Madras, in Persia about 80,000 persons called Soofies who about 1808 openly renounced Mahomedanism, abolished circumcision, established separate places of worship and adopted a peculiar dress, to distinguish themselves from the Mahomedans. They speak highly of Christ and revere the scriptures. They would receive the bible

and especially the new testament with joy and would support with zeal all attempts to enlighten their nation.

There are many Jews in Persia, but they are very degenerate, daily deserting their own faith and embracing that of Mahomed. The number of Christians in Persia is about 200,000; consisting of Armenians, Georgians Nestorians, Jacobites and some Romish christians. The Armenians are by far the most numerous, are enterprising merchants and have the commerce of the country principally in their own hands. Amidst the persecution and suffering they have endured from the Mahomedans, they have maintained their faith; and their churches are seen in all the large towns, showing almost the only bright spots in the dark picture of this benighted region.

III Jews in the third place to enquire into

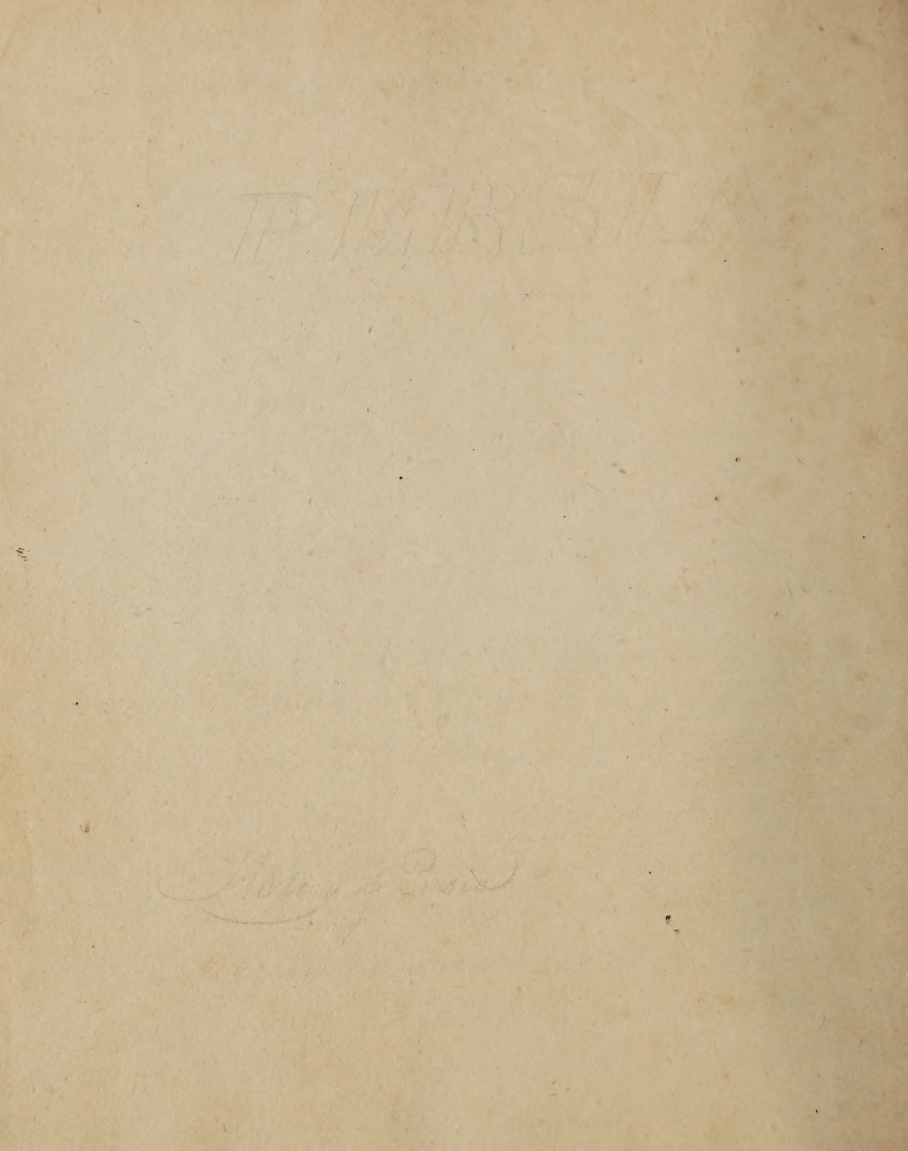
some of the best probable means of extending the gospel in that country.

It will be recollected that the gospel has already been introduced into Persia and something done to extend it. It is well known that "that man of God" as he is called by the Persians, Mr. Martyn spent a part of his missionary life and useful life in this country. While at Shiraz he accomplished the translation of N. Testament and the book of Psalms into the Persian language, which has excited a good deal of attention, and meets with high approbation from the king. Mr. Martyn travelled into other parts of the kingdom and had several controversies with their learned men on the subject of the gospel. The labours of Mr. Martyn. The high estimation in which his translation of the scriptures is held — The spirit of enquiry it has excited, even among their learned — The lax manner in which they hold Mohamedanism — Their more extensive intercourse with Christian nations, seem strongly

to presage that the time to build up Zion in this interesting part of the world is near=ly come.

Those who are best acquainted with the re=ligious state of Persia are unanimously of the opinion that it would not be prudent, in the present state of things, to send mis=sionaries. They should go as learned men, distribute the scrip=tures among them, as they seem to be fully ready to receive them, and not controver=sies with their learned men, as there seems to be the greatest opportunity and the greatest prospect of doing good. They discover a great willingness to enter into controversies, even of a religious nature, and will not get offended, unless their great prophet is reviled or they called infidels.

Much might be done also thro. the medium of the missionary establishment at Astrachan a city on the Caspian sea which is a great thorough=fare between northern Europe and the east and visited by great numbers of Persians.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